

# Home Heating Oil Spills

## **How do home fuel oil spills occur?**

Home fuel oil spills occur when basement storage tanks are overfilled or attempts are made to fill tanks that are removed. Sometimes fuel oil is put into a septic tank vent or well casing by mistake. Since fuel oil is a hazardous substance, it is important to use proper clean up methods to prevent damage to human health and the environment.

## **What are the basics of cleaning up a basement fuel oil spill:**

### Prevent an explosion or fire

Turn off all flame and spark sources. Don't smoke or light matches in the area. Keep all sources of ignition away from the area until the spill is completely cleaned up. Extinguish pilot lights on furnaces, water heaters, and gas dryers. Turn off gas appliances that have electronic ignitions.

### Report the spill

If an oil delivery company was involved, call them immediately to report the spill. Ask them to take care of the clean up. Hazardous substance spills must be reported to the DNR 24-hour hotline, 1-800-943-003.

### Open windows to control odors

Open basement windows to ventilate the area. Close all basement cold air returns and heat registers, including the basement door. Close other openings that may allow vapors to enter the upper floors of your home.

### Prevent exposure

Fuel oil contains many toxic substances, some which may cause cancer at high levels and long-term exposure. Avoid breathing the fuel oil fumes and prevent skin contact. When cleaning up a fuel spill, wear rubber gloves and old shoes that can be thrown away. Ventilate the area as much as possible during the clean up. Wash exposed skin with soap and warm water.

Consider staying at a motel or with relatives until the clean up is complete. Moving out of your home for a day or two may be a good idea, especially if there are young children, elderly, or infirm people in the home.

### Cleaning up the oil

Spread an absorbent material like cat litter or sawdust over the spill. Shovel the absorbed oil into heavy-duty plastic bags. Keep bags outside until they can be picked up for disposal.

Use soap and hot water to clean the floor, walls, appliances and other hard surfaces. Check under appliances, such as the washer and dryer, to be sure all oil residue is removed. Repeated cleanings may be necessary.

Call a professional cleaning service if the spill is large, if you need help with the clean up, or if the fuel oil odors remain.

### **What to expect after the clean up?**

Residual fuel oil odors should go away after several days. Persistent odors indicate a continued source such as saturated cinder blocks, contaminated soils, sumps, or floor drains that need additional clean up.

Chemical air fresheners are not recommended. These products merely mask the fuel odor by adding other volatile chemicals to an already complex mixture. Their use may increase symptoms in sensitive individuals.

### **Health concerns?**

Fuel oil vapors can cause serious health problems. Typical symptoms caused by fuel oil vapors include headaches, nausea, dizziness, and irritation of the eyes, nose, throat, and lungs. Some individuals may be more sensitive to these effects than others. Skin contact may cause redness and burning.

See a doctor if you have symptoms that don't improve when you are away from the fuel oil vapors.

### **Who to call for help?**

- Call your oil delivery company. They may be able to help with the clean up.
- The DNR 24-hour hotline for reporting spills is 1-800-943-0003.
- Call your local health department or family physician for health related questions.
- Call your homeowner's insurance representative. Your policy may provide financial assistance for clean up or temporary housing expenses.
- Visit the department's website, [www.dhfs.state.wi.us/eh](http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/eh)



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